

Buchbesprechung

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PASTERNAK, J.: *Fluttering Encounters in the Amazing Archipelago*. 135 pp, 204 colour photographs, DM 120,— (+ DM 20,— air postage/packing). Für Atalanta-Abonnenten innerhalb von 2 Monaten nach Erscheinen dieses Heftes DM 90,— (+ DM 20,—).

This volume describes the life-histories and habitats of virtually all species of *Ornithoptera* (birdwing butterflies) occurring in the Indonesian Archipelago, New Guinea and Australia. Comprising 135 pages with 204 colour-photos, this beautiful but relatively inexpensive book gives detailed descriptions of many rare butterflies from inaccessible areas, notably the forested slopes of New Guinea. Although most of us have admired dead specimens in museum collections, few have had the opportunity of observing these beauties within their natural habitats. This is particularly true of the rarer species including *O. paradisea*, *O. meridionalis* and, especially, *O. alexandrae*. With his vivid descriptions, both of the living butterflies and their often remote habitats, JAN PASTERNAK gives us a feeling of *being there*.

The spectacular *Ornithoptera* have been known for more than 150 years and most Natural History Museums have exhibits. However, apart from the more common *O. priamus*, there are very few detailed descriptions of their life-histories. JAN PASTERNAK has filled this gap. Based on nearly 30 years of field-study, he has described and illustrated the immature stages and host plants of most species. But because many of the original habitats have been destroyed by logging, this book will not be surpassed and I fear that PASTERNAK's illustrations may well have historical value.

The book, following an introduction pleading for the conservation of natural forests, comprises three major chapters each treating the birdwings and their habitats in New Guinea, Sulawesi and Java. Nearly half the volume is devoted to that great island, New Guinea. The quality of his photos, notably those illustrating the larval stages of the rarer species (some for the first time), are excellent. If readers have never visited the forests of Irian Jaya or Papua New Guinea, PASTERNAK's illustrations will give them an excellent feeling for these romantic settings. His descriptions of those magical tailed birdwings, *O. meridionalis* and *O. paradisea* are excellent. For naturalists unable to visit the remote forests of New Guinea, PASTERNAK's illustrations and exhilarating descriptions are the next best thing.

PASTERNAK's full page photos and discussions are informative for not only does he describe the habitats and food plants of these magnificent insects but he also gives the reader precise information concerning their *mode de vie* including egg-laying habits, style of flight, abundance, and distribution. The adult butterflies generally fly rapidly and frequent tree-tops rendering photography virtually impossible. But JAN PASTERNAK has overcome this major problem by locating their food plants, sometimes with considerable physical perseverance. Caterpillars are fairly obvious (once one has located the host plant) and because their respective chrysalids generally are suspended below nearby leaves or twigs, he has been able to observe and photograph freshly emerged adults—in all their splendour.

PASTERNAK is especially attracted to New Guinea, notably the island of Yapen (NE Irian Jaya) and this attachment is reflected in the structure of his book: his coverage of the other islands, notably Sulawesi and Java, is less detailed. However, he does make a major contribution in carefully describing and illustrating the tropical mountain forests of Java. Although very limited in extent, these beautiful forests, locally rich in rare *papilios* and other butterflies, are confined to the higher flanks of volcanos and remote tablelands. His illustrations of the Javanese mountain forests are beautiful.

This is an exciting book. It will stimulate both professionals and amateur naturalists, whatever their age, for it gives the reader an excellent impression of how birdwing butterflies and their larvae behave in nature. PASTERNAK expresses his observations in an enthusiastic manner making the reader feel that he is almost part of their habitat. I have read his book four times and, undoubtedly, will repeat the experience.

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